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ABSTRACT

In research begun in 1999, participant perceptions of the elements required for successful school-university partnerships were explored. All participants were involved in partnerships of the Chicago Public Schools with a university partner. This study asked participants, through a series of focus groups, to examine, discuss, and draw their own conclusions about the data collected. By eliciting interpretations from the school administrators, classroom teachers, and university partnership coordinators and directors, this research increased understanding of how school-university partnerships are established and maintained. Four focus groups were established: five principals; three teachers; three university partnership coordinators; and three university directors. In this study, participants were asked to name factors related to partnership success identified in previous research through a Q sort technique and they were asked to interpret three Q-sort items from the previous study. Overall, there was a real consistency in the names developed by the focus groups for the factors. Focus group sessions did reinforce some differences in the perspectives of school-based partners in schools on probation versus those involved in partnerships voluntarily. Their comments on forced partners have implications for the consideration of trust in educational partnerships. Study findings show that using focus groups as a tool for organization development holds promise for asking people to step back from the day-to-day concerns of the partnership to work on maintaining healthy partnerships. (Contains 2 tables and 26 references.) (SLD)

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Understanding Successful School-University Collaboration: Drawing Conclusions Through Focus Groups

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Introduction

Colleges of Education continue to be involved in a variety of school-university partnerships. Such partnerships may be developed to take advantage of grant funding or may be part of the movement to create Professional Development Schools as initiated by the Holmes Group (Fullan, Galluzzo, Morris, and Watson, 1998). External partners may also be called upon to provide technical assistance to comprehensive school reform programs (Education Commission of the States, 1998).

In research begun in 1999, participant perceptions of the elements required for successful school-university partnerships were explored. All participants were involved in partnerships of Chicago Public Schools with the same Chicagoland University partner. The perceptions of participants involved in voluntary partnerships of were compared with those of participants at "probation" schools, where partnership was mandated by the school board. Based on analysis of those data, the authors drew preliminary conclusions about differences among participant perceptions. The current study continues this research by asking the participants, through a series of focus groups, to examine, discuss, and draw their own conclusions about the data collected. By eliciting interpretations from the school administrators, classroom teachers, and university partnership coordinators and directors who participated in the original data collection, this research increased understanding of how school-university partnerships are established and maintained.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is based on both organization and interorganization theory. Viewing an educational partnership as an organization suggests examination of such elements as members, structure, goals, resources, and output, as well as its operation within an environment. Partnerships may be established in response to environmental turbulence or uncertainty of member organizations (Daft, 1989). Partnerships link two or more organizations in collective, goal-directed behavior. Study of interagency relationships includes analysis of process dimensions (e.g., flow of information and resources) and perceived effectiveness (Van de Ven, 1976). Gray (1989) suggested that partners negotiate and renegotiate their relationship as they work together to solve a problem of common interest. This dynamic nature of partnerships as

relationships may reveal stages or levels of interdependence including cooperation, coordination, and collaboration (Cook and Cookingham, 1980; Intrilligator, 1992).

There is a growing body of literature on educational partnerships. Tushnet (1993b) concluded that because of the complex nature of partnership process, partnerships may not be the best approach to achieving educational reform. Further, Tushnet found that while parity among the partners may be expected (1993a, 1993c), achieving successful outcomes may not be related to the specific structure of such partnerships (1993b). Communication among partners may be more difficult because of cultural differences between schools and universities (Teitel, 1998). Achieving parity in educational partnerships may be difficult "especially when teachers are in equal relationships with those whom they formerly viewed as authorities" (Teitel, 1996, p. 2). Investigating members' reasons for staying involved in a partnership project, Borthwick found that "member participation was sustained primarily due to project focus, including worthwhile goals, broader visions for school reform, and project outcomes" (1995, p. 15). Exchange for mutual benefit was the second reason given for continued participation. Teitel's (1998) analysis of the relationships between 20 partnerships in a network developed by a state department of education used the metaphors of separation, divorce, and open marriage to describe the outcomes of dysfunctional partnerships and encouraged honest discussion of process issues.

Analysis of organizations often involves a process called "organization development" (OD), a strategy for planned organizational change which began with the work of Kurt Lewin in the late 1940s (Huse & Cummings, 1985). The OD process involves the collaboration of a consultant-facilitator and the work group to be studied in the diagnosis of organizational subsystems and processes. Such diagnosis can suggest action or intervention to be taken "to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes" (French & Bell, 1984, p. 17). The OD process frequently follows the steps of action research (Huse & Cummings, 1985). "Action research is aimed both at helping a specific organization increase its effectiveness and at developing new knowledge that can be applied in other settings" [emphasis in original] (Huse & Cummings, 1985, p. 21). Action research includes systematic collection of data "about an ongoing system…[and] feeding these data back into the system" (French & Bell, 1984, p.p. 107-108). Discussion of data enables new perspectives and attitudes to emerge from the work group.

Methodology

Using focus groups, this research enabled participant interpretation of data and results obtained through Q-Sorts (see McKeown & Thomas, 1988) and interviews they completed during 1999-2000 (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2000). Subjects in

that study were participants from ten school-university partnerships (N=34). While all partnerships were between Chicago Public Schools and one Chicagoland University, five of the partnerships had been established because the schools had been placed on probation and were required to have an external partner. Subjects included principals (N=10), one assistant principal, teachers (N=10), university partnership coordinators (N=9), and four directors from the university's center for collaborative activities.

During Fall 2000, these participants were invited to attend focus group sessions to examine, discuss, and draw conclusions from systematic analysis of the 34 Q Sorts and interviews. The use of focus groups enabled the authors to share the results from their previous research study and at the same time "check the conclusions from their analyses" (Morgan, 1996, p. 3) as well as "clarify poorly understood results" (Morgan, 1996, p. 4).

Focus groups were formed based on the participants' work roles. "The rule for selecting people for focus groups tends to be commonality rather than diversity. Research has shown that people tend to disclose more to people who resemble them in various ways than to people who differ from them" ("Focus Group Research," 2000, p. 1). Thus, the four groups were: principals (N=5); teachers (N=3); university partnership coordinators (N=3); and university directors (N=3) (Table 1). Although the use of work groups mixed individuals from voluntary and involuntary partnerships, we believed this would work better than mixing participants of differing work roles.

The authors presented the data and then served as moderator and recorder at each session. Each focus group session was both audio- and video-taped, and the tapes were transcribed. Further, interested school-based participants were invited to join in the analysis and write-up of focus group outcomes to expand the authorship of this research paper.

Previous Study. During the 1999-2000 Q-Sort activity (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2000), participants sorted 54 cards containing Q stimulus items (See Appendix A.) along a continuum of *Most Necessary* to *Most Unnecessary* to establishing and maintaining a successful school-university partnership. Participants also completed a brief interview discussing (1) items placed in the categories of *Most Necessary* and *Most Unnecessary* during the Q-Sort activity and (2) advantages and disadvantages of having a partnership at their school site. In Spring 2000, responses to the Q Sort were analyzed using PQMethod version 2.06 software (freeware) to establish the correlation between subjects' responses and complete a factor analysis (searching for clusters of participants who had sorted the items in a similar fashion). Interviews were transcribed, sorted according to Q Stimulus item or other identified themes, and analyzed using constant comparative analysis to provide explanation and extension of the Q-Sort statistical results. Results of the 1999-2000 study found that, of the 34 participants, 23 clustered

into one of five factors, suggesting that various individuals would operate differently within the scope of educational partnerships. The largest group (Factor 1) consisted of seven persons, all working at probationary schools. Factors 2 and 3 included five and four persons, respectively, who were either external partner program directors or working at schools with voluntary partnerships. Factor 4, which included three persons, was a mixed group, and Factor 5 consisted of four persons working in voluntary partnerships. Participant interviews suggested confusion over the meaning of the term "politics" (as reflected in selected Q Sort items) and an overwhelmingly low regard for the importance of politics in such collaborations.

Current Study. In the current study, the focus groups addressed the following questions:

1. What names would you give the five factors to help explain each group's perspective on educational partnerships? Describe how you think each group believes successful school-university partnerships should work.

2. Based on interview data, participants may have had some confusion over the meaning of Q-Sort items 42, 44, 45. How did you interpret these items and how did that affect your placement of the items on the continuum? In relation to the operation of school-university partnerships, how do you define the term "politics"?

Focus group participants did not know if they loaded on a particular Factor until after the discussion, but some wondered aloud and/or projected where they might be.

We anticipated interesting results from the focus groups because, as the editor of *Operant Subjectivity*, a journal publishing Q research, had shared:

> My experiences have been that the use of Q Methodology as a set of research design principles allows the participant-sorters to remain very close to the interpretations even after their data are mixed in with all the other 30 or more sorters. By that I mean, the ultimate assessment of the adequacy of the factor solution is whether or not the participants are able to see themselves in the stories told by the factors. If they can retain an identity with "their own" factor, it makes them quite a bit more willing to examine and try to appreciate the viewpoints of others. That happy circumstance then prepares the ground for the possibility of meaningful compromise, should that be necessary. (R.G. Mrtek, Personal communication, July 20, 2000)

Finally, we (the authors) discussed the following questions as we reviewed transcripts from the focus group sessions:

1. Based on the results of the focus groups, what additional insights do we have related to establishing and maintaining successful school-university partnerships?
2. Based on the results of the focus groups, how might a partner use a modified Q-Sort activity with a school leadership team?

Limitations

Although the original study participants received letters well in advance of the planned focus group sessions, attendance was limited. Of ten teachers who participated in the first study, only three attended, and one of these left before the session was over. Of nine coordinators, only three attended, and again one had to leave early. Attendance of principals and directors was better: three of four directors attended, as well as five of eleven principals/assistant principal.

The focus group sessions lasted from one and one-half to two hours. This gave participants a chance to review the methodology and outcomes from the original Q Sort activity and to discuss each factor. They then worked to name the factors. However, in reviewing the transcripts, we felt that the participants sometimes presented names for factors without thoroughly explaining their rationale for the names. This may have been due to the moderator encouraging the group to move ahead due to time restraints.

Results

Teachers

Three teachers participated in focus group sessions to interpret the Q sort data. In the 2000 Q Sort Activity, two had been at schools on probation and the other had been at a school with a voluntary partnership. Two teachers (Lewis and Wilkins) had loaded on Factor 1, whereas the third (Talisman) had not loaded on any of the five factors.

The Probation Lens. As the teachers began interpreting the Q item ranking by the first Factor, they focused on the items considered "most unnecessary" to make meaning of the Factors' perspective. The importance of probation status in their meaning-making emerged immediately. For instance, one of the least necessary elements to a successful school-university partnership identified by Factor 1 was an up-to-date school infrastructure. In an attempt to understand this choice, Wilkins explained that an up-to-

date infrastructure was not all that important because "...the thing was, you know, get off probation....Anything else, you know, it doesn't matter....A lot of the thing was just getting the students' scores up and getting off probation." Talisman concurred, "And everything else was secondary....The main thing [was]...to survive....Because they were closing positions in schools."

These three teachers readily identified and related to Factor 1's choices of which items were most and least necessary. Factor 2, which contained primarily persons working in voluntary partnerships, seemed to our three teachers to be the opposite of Factor 1. The teachers had difficulty understanding why Factor 2 would rank certain items as necessary versus unnecessary to successful school-university partnerships. The item, "School is stable," ranked as one of the unnecessary items, generated a discussion that underscored these teachers' concern with probation status:

Wilkins: "School is stable" is unnecessary? I can't understand that one.

Talisman: Because if the school is unstable then those schools definitely are going to fluctuate. Students transferring in and out.

Wilkins: Yeah.

Talisman: You'll be on probation forever.

Wilkins: Forever.

The teachers concluded that the focus of Factor 2 was "altogether different" from that of Factor 1, attributing this difference to the fact that Factor 1 consisted of probation school workers, whereas Factor 2 consisted of voluntary partnership school workers. However, the teachers continued to discuss the choices of the Factor 2 group, expressing their disagreement with that group:

Lewis: I find it interesting...that ["The goals of the project are successfully met"] is not important. That those are things that are least important. Yet, what's really important is that we disseminate this information about--

Wilkins: Yeah.

Lewis: --project efforts and outcomes at school district and national levels. That's really interesting that they think that's important. That we almost get PR or something.

Talisman: PR, exactly. That's what I was thinking.

After a brief interruption, this discussion continued:

Lewis: But that doesn't make sense to say we want dissemination about project efforts, but we don't care whether we were successful or not. Let's just tell people we're doing it.

Wilkins: What we're doing, right...almost like a show-off, right?
Talisman: Exactly. That's corporate big business.
Wilkins: That's right.
Talisman: Advertisement. Get our names out there.
Wilkins: Our names out there, right.

Embedded in these teachers' interpretations, and evident again in subsequent talk, is a reflection of negative feelings toward university partners in general:

Talisman: Just so we're [the partner] is doing something. You guys make it happen.
Wilkins: [The partner is] giving you the strategies--now you make it work on your own.

The teachers continued to express frustration with the choices of Factor 2 and at one point, unable to see the logic behind this group's choices of what was least necessary to a successful partnership, concluded that their choices were, in fact, senseless: the result of hasty decision-making while performing the Q sort task. The teachers wrapped up their discussion of this factor by stating that they disagreed with Factor 2's choices and explaining why:

Lewis: I don't know why they say [common goals] are not important...but I can tell you that if they...don't have the goals that the school has, [the school personnel] are not going to be interested. I can tell you that...If you're not doing something that's going to benefit me, I'm not going to be interested.

Factors 3, 4, and 5 generated less discussion than did Factors 1 and 2. Factor 3 seemed to the teachers to "go with the first group more." The choices of Factor 3, especially "Partners re-examine and change goals over time" and "Partners discuss and agree on their process for shared decision-making," seemed logical to the teachers and, importantly, more useful for partnerships at probation schools. Lewis commented, "It seems as if the necessary elements [chosen by Factor 3] go together. It seems to me those things would be necessary if you're working in a probation school. That's what's interesting to me even though these [the Factor 3 loaders] are at voluntary partnerships."

A striking feature of these teachers' discussion was the similarity of their viewpoints. Though they were from different schools, the teachers built upon one another's insights during the discussion and came to a common interpretation of the Q data. They arrived at a consensus easily, virtually never disagreeing with one another. Being a teacher and experiences at probation schools appeared to be powerful bonding forces.

Naming the factors. The names given to the five factors were "The Doers" or "The Gotta Doers" for Factor 1, reflecting the urgency of the work done at probation schools; "The Talkers," "The PR Group," or the "Look At Us Group" for Factor 2, in part to distinguish this group from Factor 1; "The Energizers" for Factor 3, reflecting that group's focus on energy and change; "The Groupies" for Factor 4, referring to this group's apparent preference for working in groups or with peers; and "Perplexed" for Factor 5, reflecting the lack of information available for this group on which to base an interpretation.

Coordinators

Of the nine partnership coordinators who completed the Q Sort activity, three attended the focus group session. Two had worked with partnerships involving schools on probation (Luther and Meriwether) while the third (Pecos) had worked in a voluntary partnership. One coordinator also mentioned that he/she also served as a probation manager. None of the three Coordinators in attendance loaded on a Factor.

Exploring the relationship of roles and factors. As they reviewed the data, Luther, Meriwether, and Pecos paid special attention to the roles of the participants who loaded on various factors. For example, they identified the principals, teachers and coordinator in Factor 1 as "front-liners"; the principals, teacher, and project directors in Factor 2 as being at a managerial or administrative level but at a more hands-on level than the people in Factor 3; and the principal, coordinator, and two university Center directors in Factor 3 as taking the viewpoint of overseers, those at the top of the hierarchy and least involved with day-to-day operations. In a similar manner, references were made to Factor 2 as being the Lieutenants and Factor 3 as being the Generals.

Sharing differing views. As the group began the work of interpreting the story behind each factor, an immediate difference in perspective arose. Luther, a coordinator in partnerships involving schools on probation, confirmed Factor 1's placement of an item related to mutually beneficial exchanges as unnecessary. "If we're going in to help a school, why do we need to benefit?" (Luther, 213). On the other hand, Pecos, a coordinator of voluntary partnerships, exclaimed, "I come from such a different perspective on that one....That's where the strength of our networks is....So, in our networks I would say those things would be ranked really highly" (Pecos, 227-263). Much later in the focus group session, Meriwether confirmed that the comparison of various Factors "makes me think that the way that a voluntary school looks at this type of change is totally different to the way that people involved in an involuntary process view it" (Meriwether, 3075). Further, while Pecos suggested that putting schools on probation could be viewed as "punishing" (Pecos, 632), Luther commented that the

method "was found, unfortunately, to be more productive than allowing schools to, at their own pace, make the changes because those changes did not occur" (Luther, 657).

Searching for common elements. Comparing the Q Sample items identified for each Factor, the coordinators looked for common elements. Finding no common unnecessary elements, the coordinators began to ask about the structure of the Q Sample. The group reviewed a table showing how the 54 Q Sample items fit into 13 categories and 5 domains. (See Appendix B.) Soon, Luther made his own table to demonstrate which domains were represented in necessary/unnecessary items for each Factor and pointed out that each factor had two necessary elements in the domain of Interactions (e.g., communications, decision-making/action planning, group dynamics). Further, Luther noted that each Factor had one item from the Focus domain (e.g., goals, context, outcomes), although sometimes the items were in opposing positions (necessary vs. unnecessary). The group also tried to make sense of why individuals in Factor 2 placed several Focus items (1, 5, 6, 11) on the unnecessary side of the continuum. "I would think that those coming from a leadership perspective "would find goals, context, and outcomes to be important--or at least in the middle group, but not unnecessary" (Luther, 2422). However, Meriwether suggested that this group, including the Project Directors, still tended to be more hands-on.

Naming the factors. When pressed to provide names for each of the Factors, Luther returned to terminology used very early in the focus group session. Early on, Factor 1 had been labeled as "Action" because of the flow from goals to implementation identified in necessary elements (Luther, 1069). "Take the plan, hit the ground, and then roll it out" (Luther, 2955). Similarly, Luther described Factor 2 as a process, a "circular kind of thing…[Y]ou kind of know the context, and then get people into the right roles and responsibilities. "Get the money, do the work, and then tell about it" (Luther, 3046). Luther saw a "fluidity" in Factor 3, suggesting life, growth and adaptation--"that partnership is dynamic and changes" (Luther, 3308). Further, Luther suggested "Stop, Look and Listen" as the process used by Factor 4 which included items on various forms of communication and knowing when to shift roles and responsibilities. Factor 5 was referred to only briefly, described as individuals who don't think relationships are important. Thus, Luther took the lead in identifying process-oriented names for the factors, including Action (Factor 1), Definition (Factor 2), Movement (Factor 3), and Reflection (Factor 4). Meriwether's approach, on the other hand, was more related to identifying roles, orientation, and approach to partnership activities (e.g., Front-Liners, Hands-on Managers, Generals).

Principals

Five principals participated in our focus group. Brown and Paver were

both from probation partnerships and both loaded on factor one. A third principal, Clark, was also from a probation partnership and loaded on no factor. West was from a voluntary partnership and loaded on factor three. Palomino was from a voluntary partnership at the time he performed the Q Sort, but clearly remembered when his school had been on probation previously. He loaded on factor five and was the only person in the entire study to interpret that factor.

Developing and evolving partnerships. Factor 1 included two principals, three teachers, and one coordinator; all were involved in probation partnerships. Actually, Brown and Paver were the two principals who had loaded on this factor, but we did not disclose this fact during the focus session. One of the strongest impressions to emerge from this session was that the experience of being on probation is an unpleasant and emotionally charged one. Brown, especially, painted the experience as demeaning.

Brown was quick to agree with the statements that defined Factor 1:

> [L]et me say that the things that are listed here, and having gone through that process and definitely understanding how the principal, or the administrator would have felt being told that this is where your school now stands, everything that is here, if it was going to work—all of these elements had to be there" (96-100).

Brown felt it was important that partners share common goals because her staff was so resistant.

> 'How dare them to say this about me. This is not me.' And when I approached them [the teachers] with the idea that we're going to need some help, 'We don't need any help. We can do this by ourselves.' But I had to explain to them, 'We can't. We've got to be ---we've got to see things from a different perspective. Otherwise, we're going to sink.' (109-113)

Brown successfully fought to change external partners. "My thing is to find that partner who would recognize what our needs are, not demean us in any way" (125-126).

Paver also fought for a change in her school's external partner. The original partner did not share her vision. "And it was a really unusual situation to go into so I said, 'I don't think this will work,' and so, you know, having an external partner that shares certain goals and can articulate them was very, very important" (205-208). Paver also felt that the role of her external partner had decreased when her school was taken off probation (220-229). It was agreed that funding may not be important because probation partnerships are paid for by the Board of Education.

When West, whose school had a voluntary Annenberg partnership, objected to the statement about networking being among the unnecessary elements because, in her opinion, probation schools need to end their isolation, Brown explained that her teachers were opposed to networking outside of the school setting. "They let it be known, 'we will not let another teacher talk to us.' It has to come in-house" (147-148).

Palomino was so incensed about being on probation that he compared his school to the two other schools on probation with similar poverty levels and found his test scores superior. He was the principal who expressed his own denial about the situation (408-415; 181-185).

Trusting and operational partnerships. Palomino characterized Factor 2 as one with "administration domination," and could understand the point of view of administrators who just wanted to enhance already successful schools through a voluntary partnership. While the others were somewhat baffled by the fact that goals were not important to this group, West described these partnerships as ones where the goals had already been defined (538-539).

Progressive partnerships. Palomino characterized Factor 3 as an elite group (377-384), labeling these partnerships as progressive: "They don't worry about community stabilization; they don't worry about participant roles; they don't worry about communication of partners. So, they're already progressive. They have gone beyond operational, in my perspective" (569-572). West, who loaded on this factor agreed with item 43, that multiple partners operate as peers, as being totally necessary. West had several university partners that implement several initiatives at her school (355-362).

Working and committed partnerships. West commented that all three necessary elements in Factor 4 were important in successful partnerships such as the ones that are functioning at her school (460-469).

Successful partnerships. Although we could not make sense of Factor 5, this focus group was able to. West noted that the two unnecessary elements that define this factor were unnecessary in successful partnerships. Palomino, who loaded on this factor, understood that this factor would describe those involved in successful partnerships (564-566). Palomino did not really view his school as unsuccessful. "I shouldn't have been in probation to begin with because I had 14.9 at the time and I was not notified until three months later. Accountability called me, so I didn't demoralize my staff. We just continued on. We were like we were never on probation period because I knew that the school culture was a good culture" (181-185).

Directors

Three of the four directors who completed the Q Sort activity were able to participate in the focus group session (Addams, Cavaretta, and Sinclair). Cavaretta loaded on Factor 2, and Addams and Sinclair loaded on Factor 3. Since materials handed out at all focus group sessions identified roles of Q Sort participants including University project directors and Center directors, Addams, Cavaretta, and Sinclair were aware of the Factors on which they loaded as they participated in the focus group conversation.

Factor 1: Results and Task Oriented. When discussing Factor 1, the directors agreed that schools on probation were under the gun to perform. Common goals, strategic planning processes, and structure were identified. As stated by Sinclair:

> And so, they want to make sure that we're on the same page as what they're on. Because if we're not on the same page, we're not supporting them to do what they need to do, and this is a matter, for them, of survival. (Sinclair, 95)

Further, the group noted the short-term focus of principals on raising test scores and the fact that once schools got off probation, many could be expected to drop out of the partnership arrangement. Finally, the directors confirmed that the focus of these partnerships was not on building relationships but rather on the contracted services to be provided by the external partner.

Factor 2: Systemic Relationship Development. Factor 2's focus on development of relationships included roles, boundaries, linkages, and processes. As the group discussed Factor 2, they wondered aloud why the university's two project directors who provided leadership to partnerships with schools on probation had loaded on Factor 2 rather than Factor 1. Likewise, project director Cavaretta confirmed that procedures outlined for coordinators and consultants working with schools on probation included a definite focus on articulating goals, identified as unnecessary by those in Factor 2. However, after struggling with the "mismatch" (Addams 595), the group confirmed that the Center itself viewed working with schools as relationship building. Cavaretta concluded:

> It may be my goal and the goal of this project to bring a vision of another way of functioning to the school, which involves relationships, collaboration, changing the climate, engaging with students; and the goal of the school may be reading, reading, reading, get me off of probation. And so…that's a disconnect that we allow to exist and will continue to exist.

Factor 3: Mutually Beneficial Dynamic Change Process. This focus group thought that Factor 3 described, perhaps, the "ideal" partnership: a reciprocal relationship of peers in a dynamic and adaptive partnership that is sustained over a long period of time (Sinclair, 987). Whereas Factors 1 and 2 were seen as focusing on the project from the inside out, Factor 3 was seen as focused on the partnership from the outside in (Addams, 2058; Cavaretta, 2073).

Factor 4: School-Focused Interpersonal Process. The directors suggested that individuals in Factor 4 were more interested in person-to-person dynamics than system issues (Sinclair, 1451). Considering the increasing role of the school and the decreasing role of the University over time, Addams confirmed such a vision as part of the Annenberg partnerships. Because both Addams and Sinclair loaded on Factor 3, Sinclair agreed: "I think Annenberg defines school-university partnerships in a different way than we do" (1673). In considering item 42 (Partners couple hard work with attention to group dynamics including political considerations), Cavaretta suggested "the political context in the school and the community has a significant impact, both on the dynamics of how people interrelate and on the ability of the system to really work together with a partner" (1736).

School-University Partnerships as an Evolving Process. Throughout their discussion, the directors began to envision the factors as a series of stages through which a partnership might evolve. For example, a partnership might move from a results-oriented focus to become more relationship-oriented (Sinclair, 864). The group spent some time contrasting the location of item 23, Participant roles and responsibilities…are clearly defined, as necessary in Factor 2 and unnecessary in Factor 3, concluding that the tolerance for ambiguity was actually lowest in schools on probation (Factor 1). As explained by Cavaretta:

> Part of the function of the partnership under the probation process is to provide that kind of clear message, straightening out of roles/responsibilities, putting in a structure that is reliable, predictable, consistent, which everyone can articulate and remember and recall (1158).

Thus, as concluded by this focus group, a school-university partnership might evolve in this order: Factor 1, Factor 2, Factor 4, Factor 3.

Focus Groups' View of Politics Items

Each of the four focus groups commented on the Q sort participants' negative reactions to the items mentioning politics ("Partners couple hard work with attention to group dynamics including political considerations" [item 42]; "The director/coordinator

engages in non-partisan political activity" [item 44]; and "Lobbying by special interest groups influences decisions in the collaborative" [item 54]). Of the thirty-four original participants, four reacted to item 42, thirteen to item 44, and eighteen to item 54 by placing them in one of the lowest four positions and, thereby, labeling them as "least important" to a successful school-university partnership. Yet, each of the four focus groups viewed politics as a necessary evil. Politics were not considered to be "unimportant" to school-university partnerships. Discussion veered from the specific text of the Q sort items to a general consideration of politics in the workplace. Each focus group interpreted politics to mean behavior that promotes a particular interest or agenda. But for each, the arenas were different.

Directors. The directors viewed politics in several larger arenas. To them the national policy-making level was important. The text of the Q sort items was seen as irrelevant to this level of politics. "I think politics. . . is important, but I don't think these items capture it. These- - seem to be peripheral to the political process, because when I think of politics, I think. . . in terms of policy-making within the system. . ." (Sinclair, 2298-2304) They also perceived differing political agendas among the University Center for Educational Partnerships, the University College of Education, and the public schools. At the school level, this group discussed union and administrative politics, citing the group that publishes "Substance," as representing the "Nader-like" branch of the union most interested in change.

Coordinators. For the coordinators, politics was wholly in the school arena with some comparisons made to business practices. They cited special school-based interests groups such as those advocating whole language, self-contained classrooms, small class size, and homogenous grouping. It was noted that teachers, unlike employees in business, sometimes ignore politics because they know believe they can't be fired. "[I]n business. . . you had better come in there with this right attitude, because you know you can be replaced." (Meriwether, 3975-3980) ". . .Teachers know 'I've got this job! I'm not going nowhere! You can't replace me!'" (Meriwether, 4010-4012). Also, unlike business, some partners did not approach negotiation according to a strict consensus-building or conflict resolution model; the partners were only prepared to yield so much. The coordinators also felt that to place politics in the "unimportant" column was utopian.

> I would love to be able to go into a school and not have to deal with all the various politics that are going on in there, that are counterproductive to the quality education of the children. But, I'm walking into a minefield.... (Meriwether, 3860-3866).

Principals. The principals viewed politics in the community arena. They mentioned attending fund-raisers for aldermen and calling on them and precinct captains in

time of need. They also mentioned parent groups, the union, community support agencies, children's emergency services, family counseling, and churches. They viewed themselves as mediators who balanced interest groups and marshaled resources. "A good principal is a good politician. . .you have to work with people, period, and you have to make things work. And that's a political activity." (Clark, 620-623)

Teachers. Teachers viewed politics in the school arena and identified the major players as parents, the principal, groups of teachers, and Paul Vallas (CEO of Chicago Public Schools). All compete for resources. According to the teachers, principals try to staff the local school councils with people who agree with them. They try to keep the peace among factions and resist alarming the central office. Parents, especially those with special-needs children, can serve as powerful advocates for their children. A parent of a special-needs child who had Mr. Vallas' ear was able to command generous services. One teacher's school was expecting a visit from Mr. Vallas the following day and, so, was undergoing an extraordinary cleanup. Children are not at the focus of political activity.

> If we don't start out with the kids first, I have a problem with that. But we say 'Children First' (CPS motto)--and we don't, they're not, they're usually number 91st. Sometimes I look at that motto and they always get ignored (Lewis, 2082-2102).

Discussion

While three of the authors began this study as a follow-up to prior research, two additional authors joined the team. Thus the authors sought to expand the interpretation of focus group transcripts, expressing the perspectives of authors employed in school (teacher and principal) and university (coordinator and consultants) positions.

Similarities across focus groups. As the authors reviewed Table 2, they scanned down the various names given to factors. For the most part we noted a real similarity or consistency in the names derived by focus groups, for example the gotta doers (Teachers) developing a partnership (Principals) that was action (Coordinators), task (Directors), and goal (Researchers) oriented within Factor 1. Likewise naming schemes were similar for other factors. Taking another example, Factor 3 involved energizers (Teachers) who sought to maintain progressive partnerships (Principals) with movement (Coordinators) through mutually beneficial change processes (Directors) demonstrating dynamic and adaptable relationships (Researchers). Our teacher-author expressed surprise in the consistency of thought and her ability to understand others' perspectives, particularly when reading the transcript of the university partnership coordinators. The one difference in naming schemes was noted as the naming of roles by one of the coordinators in referring to front-liners, hands-on managers, and generals.

Differences between factors. Focus group sessions reinforced differences in perspectives of school-based partners in schools on probation (primarily Factor 1) vs. those involved in voluntary partnerships. This was particularly evident as three participants--Pecos (Coordinator), West (Principal), and Addams (Director)--reinforced the value of networking. As expressed by Addams:

> [What] is kind of interesting too is that they [individuals in Factor 1] don't see the reason to link…to other…community organizations and other things that would strengthen their own community and therefore increase achievement at a school because it would bring in more resources. (Addams, 186)

Forced partnerships and building trust. During focus group sessions both coordinators and directors commented on the schools' perceptions of forced partners. For example, Director Cavaretta shared: "Is your external partner either your savior or your, or the, you know, devil incarnate?" (Cavaretta 46). Likewise, Coordinator Meriwether said:

> We're not appreciated by the administration because we've been forced upon them from the district level, and they've decided that we were the best of X evils. And I know that one of the other external partners is probably considered the most of the evils, because she will run back and tell the district what's going on in that school. (Meriwether 1387)

Comments such as these led the authors to reflect on the role of trust in establishing and maintaining educational partnerships. While the principals linked trust with operational partnerships in naming Factor 2, partners in schools on probation were seen as less trusting. While actual resentment may have been toward the process and terms of probation, responses to external university partners were less than trusting. This was exhibited in teachers' reluctance to use methods espoused by their partner or teachers at other schools as well as principals' attempts to find the "right" partner, sometimes "trying on partners" to see if the relationship would work. As expressed by Principal Brown: "My thing [was] to find that partner who would recognize what our needs are, not demean us in any way." (125-126). Expecting external partners to effect change in a short period was unrealistic, especially when trust-building itself might take a period of years. Furthermore, university coordinators may need to be a bit "thick-skinned" when entering schools where partnerships are required. Finally, while Annenberg partnerships typically involve selected faculty in projects with a more-limited focus, partnerships in schools on probation were charged with involving the entire school in the change process. Thinking about partnerships as relationships may be more appropriate than thinking about them as projects.

Stages of partnership development. Two groups, Principals and Directors, chose to order the Factors to describe stages of partnership development. The principals based their ordering primarily on what was identified as "unnecessary" by those loading on a Factor. If important things like goals were identified as unnecessary, the group assumed that such things were already in place and the partners could move on to address other issues. While the Principals ordered the progression of stages as Factor 1, Factor 4, Factor 2, Factor 3, Factor 5; the Directors saw the progression as Factor 1, Factor 2, Factor 4, and Factor 3. Principals identified the Factor 5 group as having successful partnerships because they agreed only on what was unnecessary to a successful partnership. Directors saw Factor 3 as the "ideal" partnership because it suggested a reciprocal relationship of peers in a dynamic and adaptive partnership that is sustained over a long period of time.

Comments on Q Methodology. Review of the data by focus group participants also led to their discussion of Q Methodology. For example, during their focus group session, the Coordinators reflected on their own approaches to completing the Q Sort activity and the difficulty of the forced choice required by the limited number of items allowed in each area of the continuum. "I just remember that I had way more on one side than the other, and was really ticked that I had to go moving stuff over to the unnecessary side" (Meriwether, 2508).

Even though participants in the original Q Sort activity were asked to identify the number of years they had been involved in any educational partnership and to reflect on their experiences over the years, it appears that the respondents sorted Q items based on their current circumstances. Just as partnerships evolve, it appears that Q respondents might change their responses depending on the context of the partnerships in which they are working at the time they completed the Q Sort which asked them to reflect on what is necessary/unnecessary to establishing and maintaining successful school-university partnerships. As far as additional uses of Q Methodology, the directors suggested that perhaps the Q Sort could be re-administered over time to the principals in order to assess changes in their orientation and participation in a school-university partnership. For example, perhaps a principal with an initial short-term focus (Factor 1) might move into Factor 2 or Factor 3. In this way, Q Methodology could be used to track developmental stages of educational partnerships.

Conclusions

School-university partnerships are here to stay. With the current emphasis on teacher quality, schools are becoming more involved in helping universities revamp their teacher education curricula. No matter which organization serves as the "external"

partner, partnership coordinators/directors and other boundary spanners need methods to engage partners in discussing and reflecting on their partnership processes. Focus groups enable respondents to provide "insights into the sources of complex behaviors and motivations..." as they "...both query each other and explain themselves to each other" (Morgan, 1996, p. 6). More importantly, involvement in the focus group activity changes the role of participants, breaking down " the division between using groups as a means for gathering data and as a means for educating, mobilizing, or intervening with participants. This matches a widespread concern in the social sciences about the artificiality of the division between researchers and those who are researched" (Morgan, 1996, p. 11). Using focus groups as a tool for organization development holds real promise for "asking people to step back from the day-to-day concerns of the partnership" (Teitel, 1997, p. 15) and enabling members to maintain healthy partnerships. Documentation of outcomes adds to the body of knowledge about establishing and maintaining successful school-university partnerships. In their review of the literature, Thorkildsen and Stein (1996) concluded that "there is little data from controlled research" (p. 90) on school-university partnerships. Likewise, Kersh and Masztal (1998) state, "We have not systematically documented...successful collaborations. Without this notation, how can we develop principles, theories, concepts of collaboration, codify our knowledge, and develop ways to transmit this information?" (p. 5). This study, then, provides systematic research involving 14 participants in school-university partnerships who examined and discussed outcomes of a prior study (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2000) of their perspectives on establishing and maintaining successful school-university partnerships in voluntary and forced partnerships. What better way to learn more than from those who are both the subjects and interpreters of the research?

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Table 1. Number of Participants in Focus Group Session

Session	Voluntary Partnerships	Required Partnerships
Teachers	1	2
Principals	3	2
Partnership Coordinators Employed by the University	1	2
Directors and Project Directors	3	

Table 2. Factor Names Given by Focus Group Participants

Focus Group	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Teachers	Doers Gotta Doers	The Talkers, The PR Group, Look at Us Group	The Energizers	The Groupies	
Principals	Developing and Evolving Partnerships	Trusting and Operational Partnerships	Progressive Partnerships	Working and Committed Partnerships	Successful Partnerships
Partnership Coordinators Employed by the University	Front-Liners	Hands-on Managers Lieutenants	Overseers Generals		
	Action	Definition	Movement	Reflection	
Directors and Project Directors	Results and Task Oriented	Systemic Relationship Development	Mutually Beneficial Dynamic Change Process	School-Focused Interpersonal Process	
Researchers	Goal-Oriented, Short-Term Focus	Persistence/ Existence	Dynamic and Adaptable	Important Interactions	

Appendix A. Q Stimulus Items

1. The school is stable.

2. The school infrastructure is up-to-date.

3. The community is stable.

4. Partners are aware of and sensitive to the setting or context of the local school, including board and region policies, support services, potential roadblocks, and politics.

5. Partners share common goals and can articulate them.

6. The goals of the partnership are worthy.

7. Goals are interrelated with teacher, school, regional, district, community, state, and national/international goals.

8. Partners reexamine and change goals over time.

9. Members assess project impact on the students, teachers, school system, and wider community through standardized tests and/or performance assessments.

10. Members assess project impact on the students, teachers, school system, and wider community through in-person visits and other alternative data gathered as part of an evaluation design.

11. The goals of the project are successfully met.

12. Outcomes of the project serve as a formative evaluation to guide future planning of partnership activities.

13. Participants possess varied and complementary skills, knowledge, and expertise.

14. Participants represent diverse social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

15. Participants include strong leaders.

16. Participants include energetic members with time to be actively involved.

17. Individuals exhibit personal commitment through attendance at meetings, sustained involvement, taking responsibility, and effort.

18. Organizations demonstrate commitment through allocation of resources, dedication, and support.

19. Public recognition of personal and organizational contributions sustains commitment of participants.

20. External funding such as grant programs sustains commitment of participants.

21. Students are involved in meetings and participate in decisions.

22. Teachers help to determine the areas that need attention and help to find solutions to problems.

23. Participant roles and responsibilities, including those of the project director or coordinator, are clearly defined.

24. There is an active steering and/or oversight committee.

25. The partnership is adequately funded with prospects for continued funding.

26. Exchanges benefit the partners as well as the collaborative project.

27. The level of contribution of resources varies among partners.

28. Resources extend beyond funding to include other material assets and/or the sharing of information and technical expertise.

29. Opportunities for networking link partner members to other individuals, groups, and organizations for mutual, project, and community benefit.

30. Exchanges between partners are mutually beneficial. (Mutual benefits may be direct or indirect and may include money, information, visibility, status, new opportunities or connections, influence, etc.)

31. The partnership encourages members to share information and expertise.

32. The partnership has an effect beyond the partners that may include the local or wider global community.

33. The partnership has a coordinator or project director who serves as a hub for timely, clear communications.

34. Partners communicate openly with each other. They listen to one another and think the input of other partners is significant.

35. Partners communicate through persistent attempts at personal contact, small group meetings, and systematic written information.

36. Partners disseminate information about project efforts and outcomes at the school, region, district, and national levels.

37. Partners discuss and agree on their process for shared decision-making.

38. Partners use consensus to agree on priorities and project activities.

39. Partners use action planning to develop operational strategies and steps for solving problems that can be expected to arise during the normal course of business.

40. Decisions made by the partners are based on open discussion of different perspectives of the problem and partners' opinions.

41. Partners schedule adequate time to work together.

42. Partners couple hard work with attention to group dynamics including political considerations.

43. Multiple partners operate as peers. Partners may carry unequal loads, but no partner dominates over the others.

44. The director/coordinator engages in non-partisan political activity.

45. Partner activities include a research-oriented project that is intellectually interesting.

46. Participants understand each partner's corporate/institutional structure and how to negotiate that system.

47. Partners reflect on their interactions as a method of learning about key variables for establishing and maintaining successful partnerships.

48. Partners reflect on their interactions as a method of learning how to get along better.

49. Even if it becomes institutionalized, the partnership is dynamic and continues to adapt to changing conditions.

50. The partnership should move through several stages of development.

51. The activities of the partnership should become institutionalized within the school and/or district.

52. As the partnership progresses, the role and responsibilities of the school should increase as those of the external partner decrease.

53. Partnership focuses on the process of change.

54. Lobbying by special interest groups influences decisions in the collaborative.

Appendix B.

	Domain	Category	Q Stimulus Items
Partnership Process	Focus	Goals	5, 6, 7, 8, 53
		Context	1, 2, 3, 4
		Outcomes	9, 10, 11, 12
	Members	General Characteristics	13, 14, 15, 16
		Commitment	17, 18, 19, 20
		Roles and Responsibilities	21, 22, 23, 24
	Needs and Resources	Funding and Other Material Resources	25, 26, 27, 28
		Connections, Sharing, Exchanges	29, 30, 31, 32
	Interactions	Communications	33, 34, 35, 36
		Decision-Making/Action Planning	37, 38, 39, 40
		Group Dynamics	41, 42, 43, 44, 54
		Inquiry Into Partnership Process	45, 46, 47, 48
	Stages	(Stages)	49, 50, 51, 52